

MAINE FIRE PROTECTION SERVICES COMMISSION

MEETING MINUTES DECEMBER 17, 2001

The meeting of the Commission was called to order by Chairman Bill O’Gara at 1:03 P.M. Members present: Michael Albert, Jay Bradshaw, Jeff Cammack, John Dean, Darrel Fournier, Al Godfrey, Ted Johnston, Randy Keep, Jeff Maker, Harty Norris, Bill O’Gara, Jethro Pease, Dave Wacker, Steve Willis and Susan Pinette (Staff). Members excused: Jack Berry, John Cannon, Tom Parent, Michael Quint and Christine Savage. Guests: Dan Arms, MFT&E and Earle Welch, Jr. Asst. Chief Wayne Fire Dept.

The minutes of the December 3, 2001 meeting were accepted as amended with the last sentence of the second full paragraph on page 3 revised deleting “words of wisdom” and adding “suggestions”.

Old Business

Steve Willis updated the Commission members on what he had prepared for a power point presentation at tonight’s dinner meeting at the Maine Municipal Association headquarters with invited guests. He had a couple of holes that needed to be filled in and will make a presentation to the Commission members later in this meeting once they are filled in.

Jethro Pease, of the recruitment and retention committee, advised they had reviewed the RFP received and approved it. The RFP will be held and not awarded until the other RFP on the healthcare bridge is received and approved as agreed at a previous meeting. Darrel Fournier and Ted Johnston discussed the 24 hours of training, 24 hours of community service with 1 year of service credited for every 3 years served up to a total of 10 prior years of creditable service. Five years versus ten years of creditable service to qualify for the retirement plan was discussed extensively. New recruit firefighters will be vested in the program after 5 years creditable service and veterans with 10 years creditable service. Mike Albert posed a question on how far back do we go with the program as he is concerned where the money to fund it is coming from. Do we allow firefighters that have already retired without a plan to buy into this? It was agreed that those that have already left the fire service would not be allowed to buy into a retirement plan, however, retired firefighters without insurance should be allowed to buy into the healthcare bridge plan. Ted Johnston suggested that the actuarial study begin with everyone starting at zero to determine costs and then work up with the different years recommended so that funding can be analyzed to see what can be afforded.

A motion by Darrel Fournier, 2nd by Harty Norris that the Commission endorse the recruitment and retention program that will look at 24 hours per year of creditable training and 24 hours per year of department activity within the function of the national ICS/IMS system, leaving the eligibility to the committee, was discussed at length. Several members spoke on presenting this to their organizations back home and everyone appeared to be satisfied with the proposal as long as it is strictly adhered to and no one gets a free ride. It was agreed that the firefighter be certified by the Chief on an annual basis and the certification be transportable to another department if the firefighter moves to another town. It was further agreed that a 3 year review visit of the program be established to consider raising the bar to insure that the standards are appropriate. The motion passed unanimously.

Ted Johnston spoke on a Workers Compensation Board statistics handout and establishing a baseline in a number of different areas. The database isn’t real solid and cross-

referencing different state department statistics is very difficult. An extensive discussion ensued. Ted Johnston and Dave Wacker will review the information and try to determine age brackets for the various types of injuries and lost time per injury. It was agreed the Commission should try to tie this data into our report to the Governor and Legislature.

Darrel Fournier asked for an agreement among the Commission members on the healthcare bridge. Jethro Pease spelled out that the first priority is to cover the employees currently working and eligible to retire and then to address the issue of those that have already retired and have not yet reached the age of 65 to qualify for Medicare. Darrel suggested that a 3-year review in this area is also appropriate to see if adjustments are necessary. Ted Johnston spelled out that those that currently are retired and have insurance are fine and those that don't will be huge cost drivers. We need to concentrate on those currently working and eligible to retire and establish that program before considering those already retired. The three options that are being considered are benefits similar to the state employee program, a catastrophic high deductible plan only, and 24-hour non-work related coverage with moderate deductibles in the \$200. to \$500. range or 24-hour work related coverage with high deductible catastrophic such as \$5,000. The committee also looked at 3 groups. The first was retired career firefighters age 45 to 65 years to provide the gap and they haven't clarified whether they have retired yet or not. The second was active career firefighters only and eligible to retire and third was all firefighters. As you go down the list you add more firefighters to the group, however, lower the cost per member. This was voted on and approved at a previous meeting and no further vote on the subject is necessary at this meeting.

Randy Keep spoke on making the three contacts with insurance firms as requested of him at a previous meeting. Morse-Payson, Dunlap and Cross Agencies were contacted and it appears that the three in-state agencies we chose don't have the actuarial capabilities to do the work we are requesting. Morse-Payson suggested the Commission contact Gallagher and Associates (a Maine firm), Actuarial Designs and Situations (a Maine firm) and Nomer and Robinson (a national firm possibly in Boston). This isn't coming together as easily as we had expected and the Commission fully supported Randy's endeavors and requested that he contact these new agencies to see if we can find one or more that might respond to our RFP request.

At this point in the meeting Steve Willis had received enough information to complete his power point presentation and he showed the 20-slide overview to the Commission members. Several changes were recommended and approved and the presentation was finalized for the dinner meeting. The presentation was printed out and copies made to be handed out at the dinner meeting. The members then divided up the various slides and determined which member would make the individual slide presentation at the dinner meeting. It was decided that we take questions from the audience regarding each slide as they are presented.

Darrel Fournier asked if the one RFP received could be awarded and work be commenced while we are trying to find someone to work on the second RFP as a lot of work is required. It was concluded that we have to wait for the second one to insure that we have enough money to pay for both. This is not the time to award one and if we don't have enough money for the second one to go back to the Legislature for more money.

Randy Keep discussed the report on increasing the fire premium tax for this fiscal year to keep the Fire Marshal Office open for business and for this Commission addressing how the FMO and MFT&E might be funded in the future. He has done a study through the Alliance of American Insurers and strongly feels there is another funding means beyond increasing the fire premium tax. That funding would come from the State's General Fund. The hardening market is

the result of catastrophic storms beginning back in 1994 and carrying through 2001 and not the result of the terrorist attacks on 9/11/01. The other reason for rate increases is the decline in the stock market in 2001. A general discussion ensued regarding how we might fund the FMO and MFT&E beyond the current fire premium tax. There is still a question as to whether those agencies are actually receiving all of the funds that are being paid in. The State's accountability of these funds is seriously in question. John Dean advised that he sees no way that funding can be obtained from the General Fund as the projected shortfall is such that cuts will be wide spread across agencies and no money for increases will be available. Dedicating the insurance funds going into the General Fund would require major legislation, if not a constitutional amendment, to accomplish and this will not solve the immediate problem. It was concluded that the Commission must continue to search for a funding source to solve the financial problems. The search should include life carriers and liability carriers that cover other issues that the Fire and EMS services respond to and any other areas that we may be able to find.

At 4:22 P.M. Chairman O'Gara recessed the meeting, due to the snowstorm ongoing outside, to allow everyone time to travel to the Maine Municipal Association headquarters for the scheduled 5:00 P.M. dinner meeting.

The meeting reconvened at 5:27 P.M. with the following present: Commission Members – Bill O'Gara, Al Godfrey, Mike Albert, Darrel Fournier, Jeff Cammack, John Dean, Harty Norris, Jeff Maker, Randy Keep, Steve Willis, Jay Bradshaw and Susan Pinette (Staff). Invited guests – John McLaughlin of Congressman Tom Allen's Office, Stephen French Minot Fire Chief and President of the Androscoggin County Firefighters Association, Earle Welch, Jr. Wayne Asst. Fire Chief and Lakes Region Mutual Aide Group, Ronald McLallen Fayette Fire Chief and Lakes Region Mutual Aide Group, Bruce Hensler Rockport Fire Dept. and MFT&E, Marlene Thibodeau of Senator Susan Collins Office, Doug Patey Kennebunk Fire/Rescue Dept., George Davis Goodwin's Mills Fire/Rescue Dept. and Representative Peter Rines of the Maine Legislature. Various Commission members presented sections of the power point presentation before the dinner was ready to be served due to the snowstorm. A short recess was made for everyone to go through the buffet line and the meeting then continued while dinner was eaten. The Commission members outlined the missions and goals of the Commission and answered numerous questions regarding Commission activities.

New Business

The next meeting of the Commission will be held on Monday January 7, 2002 at 1:00 P.M. at the State EMS headquarters in Augusta.

With no further business to come before the Commission, the meeting adjourned at 7:13 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Albert L. Godfrey, Sr., P.E., P.L.S., C.S.E.
Secretary

